

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8948

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 SANTIAGO 2976

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PEPR, SHUM, CI
SUBJECT: SURVIVABILITY OF PINOCHET: FROM "WHAT IF?" TO "SO
WHAT?"

1. SUMMARY: WHO LEADS THE CHILEAN POLITICAL TRANSITION
PROCESS NO LONGER SEEMS AS CRUCIAL AS IT DID JUST A FEW
WEEKS AGO. THEN PINOCHET APPEARED TO BE THE MAIN STUMBLING
BLOCK TO TIMELY CHANGE, NOW, IN AN IRONIC TWIST, PINOCHET'S
VULNERABILITIES MAY HAVE CONVERTED HIM INTO A PERSON WITH
A SIZABLE STAKE IN A SPEEDED UP TRANSITION. HIS RECENT
SPATE OF DRAMATIC MEASURES ON BALANCE ARE POSITIVE. IF HE IS
FORCED OUT BY THE MILITARY, IT WILL BE BECAUSE OF LETELIER/
MOFFITT REVELATIONS NOT YET CLEARLY VISIBLE LOCALLY. BUT THE
ODDS STILL FAVOR HIS SURVIVAL. THE ISSUE FOR USG POLICY,
WITH OR WITHOUT PINOCHET, REMAINS AS BEFORE: THE APPLICATION OF
PRESSURES MODULATED SO AS TO AVOID BACKLASH. OUTSIDE PRESSURES
ON CHILE HAVE HASTENED INTERNAL REFORM; BUT THE LOCALLY
PREVALENT BELIEF THAT THE USG WANTS PINOCHET OUT AND IS USING
THE LETELIER CASE TO THAT END, COULD BE USED TO SLOW THE
TRANSITION BY PINOCHET OR A NEW JUNTA. NO ABRUPT CHANGES
IN OUR POLICY OF COOL DISDAIN ARE AS YET INDICATED.
END SUMMARY.

2. SHAKEN SUPPORTERS: LITTLE DID THE EBULLIENT PINOCHET
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FORESEE WHAT THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WOULD BRING AS HE TOLD
HIS ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTERS JANUARY 4 THAT "THERE WILL
BE NO MORE ELECTIONS IN CHILE FOR TEN YEARS". THE COST
OF HOLDING A PLEBISCITE WAS TWO-FOLD: IT AWAKENED HOPES
AMONG THE POLITICIANS AND IT FLUSHED AIR FORCE GENERAL
LEIGH OUT INTO PUBLIC OPPOSITION ON THE PIVOTAL ISSUE OF
WH WAS TO RUN CHILE. EVEN SO, PINOCHET WOULD HAVE RE-

TAINED THE CATBIRD SEAT WERE IT NOT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE. ARGENTINA TOOK ADVANTAGE OF CHILE'S ISOLATION TO RENEGE ON ITS COMMITMENT TO ACCEPT THE BEAGLE CHANNEL DECISION--AND GOT OFF SCOT-FREE. BANZER'S BREAK OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TIGHTENED INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION STILL ANOTHER NOTCH. AND THE UNFOLDING OF THE LETELIER INVESTIGATION, WHICH HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED DINA AND ARMY INVOLVEMENT IN DIRTY TRICKS AND FURTHER IMPERILED US/CHILE RELATIONS, PROVIDED THE YEAST TO SET THE GERMENTATION GOING AMONG THE GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE SUPPORTERS OF PINOCHET'S REGIME.

3. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE COUP, A WIDE RANGE OF INFLUENTIAL SUPPORTERS OF STABLE AUTHORITARIAN MILITARY RULE SERIOUSLY STARTED TO WONDER OF PINOCHET HAD BECOME A LIABILITY. IN PAST WEEKS SANTIAGO HAS SWARMED WITH "WHAT IF PINOCHET WERE TO GO" SPECULATION. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT PINOCHET WILL REMAIN, BUT DETRACTORS, INCLUDING SOME CHURCH OFFICIALS (AND LESS SIGNIFICANTLY, EVER-HELPFUL OPPOSITION POLITICIANS) VIRTUALLY BEGAN COUNTING THE DAYS. THE MEDIA OPENED ITSELF TO POLITICAL-TYPE DEBATE. AND GENERAL LEIGH KEPT UP THE CRITICISM. THESE FACTORS COMBINED TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT PINOCHET WAS LOSING HIS GRIP.

4. CATALYST--THE LETELIER/MOFFITT CASE: THE POSSIBILITY
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OF NEW REVELATIONS IN THE LETELIER CASE HANGS HEAVILY OVER THE CHILEAN SCENE. WHEN THE CASE FIRST BROKE HERE IN MARCH WE FOUND FEW CHILEANS READY TO BELIEVE THAT ANY IN THE GOC WERE INVOLVED. IN THE ENSUING MONTH, THE CLIMATE OF OPINION CHANGED DRAMATICALLY AND BY THE TIME TOWNLEY LEFT MOST EDUCATED CHILEANS HAD BEEN FORCED TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE EXISTENCE AND ACTIVITIES OF DINA. (A EUROPEAN DIPLOMAT LONG HERE AND LONG AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF GOC REPRESSION TELLS US THAT ESTABLISHMENT CHILEANS HAVE STARTED TALKING WITH HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS AND WITH (FEIGNED) AMAZEMENT ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ABUSES MIGHT HAVE OCCURRED).

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MOST CHILEANS STILL SEEM EAGER TO ACCEPT PINOCHET'S ASSURANCES THAT HE IS INNOCENT, BUT AN INCREASING NUMBER HOLD HIM AT LEAST INDIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE.

5. WITHIN THE ARMY, QUESTIONS ARE ALREADY BEING RAISED ABOUT PINOCHET'S HANDLING OF THE AFFAIR. SINCE THE MILITARY IS WELL AWARE OF THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTRERAS AND PINOCHET, EVIDENCE LINKING THE EX-DINA CHIEF TO THE CASE WILL PUT PINOCHET ON THE SPOT AGAIN. AT THIS PINT, LETELIER IS PINOCHET'S KEY VULNERABILITY.

6. PINOCHET'S COUNTER-ATTACK: IMPRESSIONS OF INEFFECTUALITY NOT MUCH TO HIS LIKING, PINOCHET HAS LAUNCHED AN OFFENSIVE TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE. A PARTIAL LIST OF DRAMATIC MEASURES TAKEN DURING APRIL INCLUDES: REVISION OF THE MECHANICS OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS WITH A PLEBISCITE ON BOTH THE TRANSITION AND FINAL CONSTITUTION DURING 1979; RELEASE OF PRISONERS TRUMPED BY SWEEPING AMNESTY; RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF DIALOGUE WITH UNHRC (MEZVINSKY TRIP); AND, RESHUFFLING AND "CIVILIANIZATION" OF THE CABINET. THE SUM OF THESE MEASURES MAY EXCEED THEIR PARTS; THEY ARE NOT EASILY REVERSED AND COULD OPEN NEW, STILL UNSEEN, AVENUES FOR FURTHER CHANGE. AND THEIR VERY PROMULGATION CHANGES THE ENVIRONMENT BY STIRRING HOPES (AND FEARS) THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL YIELD TO
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FURTHER PRESSURE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION WILL MAKE BELIEVERS IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY VERY HAPPY. AND BY REPLACING HALF THE MILITARY IN THE FORMAL CABINET WITH CIVILIANS, PINCOCHET HAS IN EFFECT WEAKENED THE ROLE OF THE OTHER SERVICES AND PUT INTO PLACE POLITICALLY INEXPERIENCED MEN PERSONALLY LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT.

7. SO FAR THE PROBABILITY IS THAT PINOCHET WILL SURVIVE. EVEN IF THE CURRENT SERIES OF ACTIONS DOES NOT ALLAY THE

QUALMS OF THE CIVILIAN ESTABLISHMENT, THE ARMED SERVICES NEED NOT FOLLOW PUBLIC OPINION. SENIOR MILITARY COMMANDERS HAVE TWO IMPORTANT LOYALTIES AT PLAY: ONE TO THEIR RESPECTIVE INSTITUTIONS, THE OTHER TO THEMSELVES. OFFSETTING IN SOME MEASURE WHATEVER PRESSURES MAY GROW TO SACRIFICE THOSE INVOLVED IN THE LETELIER CASE IN ORDER TO KEEP THE INSTITUTION FROM BEING TARRED, WILL BE THE INDIVIDUAL FEARS THAT FURTHER REVELATIONS WILL PUT OTHER HEADS ON THE BLOCK. THE ENTIRE HIGHER MILITARY STAFFS OF ALL THE SERVICES COUNTENANCED ABUSES DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS AFTER THE COUP AND MORE THAN A FEW OFFICERS WERE PROBABLY DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN REPREHENSIBLE REPRESSIVE ACTIVITY. AND AT YET ANOTHER LEVEL, THE ARMY, AS AN INSTITUTION, MUST BE PARTICULARLY CAUTIOUS ABOUT ROCKING THE BOAT. AMONG THE SERVICES IT HAS THE MOST TO LOSE BY JETTISONING PINOCHET EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD RETAIN THE PRESIDENCY IN ANY RESHUFFLE. HIS OUSTER WOULD EXACERBATE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ARMY AND THE DYNAMICS OF A NEW JUNTA CANNOT BE PREDICTED WITH CERTAINTY.

8. BUT THE "WHAT IFS?" CONTINUE. ON THE OTHER HAND, GENERAL LEIGH HAS CONTINUED HIS ATTACKS ON PINOCHET. THEY ARE SCARCELY VEILED IN PUBLIC INTERVIEWS AND DIRECT IN BACKGROUNDEERS WITH THE PRESS AND IN PERSONAL
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CONVERSATIONS. LEIGH, AND PRESUMABLY THE AIR FORCE, REALLY FEAR THAT PINOCHET IS A MEGALOMANIAC. IN ADDITION LEIGH PROBABLY HAS PERSONAL AMBITIONS BEST SERVED BY PUTTING DISTANCE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE PRESIDENT. THE NAVY, WITH ITS MORE DIFFUSE COMMAND STRUCTURE AND TRADITIONAL RETICENCE, IS ALSO THOUGHT TO BE UNHAPPY WITH PINOCHET. THEY JOINED LEIGH IN OPPOSING THE PLEBISCITE, BUT HARD EVIDENCE OF THE DEGREE OF NAVY ALIENATION WITH PINOCHET IS SCARCE. THE CARABINEROS, WITH THEIR VAST NUMBER OF ARMED MEN INCONSTANT DEPLOYMENT AS POLICE, HAVE SO FAR GONE ALONG WITH PINOCHET. BUT, BY STAYING WELL IN THE BACKGROUND, THE CARABINEROS HAVE REMAINED SOMETHING OF AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY AND ARE NOT INTIMATELY ASSOCIATED WITH PINOCHET'S REGIME. THE BOTTOM LINE, HOWEVER, IS THE POSITION OF THE ARMY.

9. PINOCHET HAS DONE HIS BEST TO RID THE SENIOR ARMY COMMAND OF CONCEIVABLE COMPETITORS. NOW EVEN GENERAL BRADY HAS BEEN NUDGED ASIDE, PERHAPS UNWILLINGLY. STRAINS BETWEEN HARD AND SOFT LINERS HAVE BECOME COMMON

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RUMOR. PINOCHET'S WILLINGNESS TO "SACRIFICE" CONTRERAS
AND OTHER OFFICERS CANNOT BUT RAISE HACKLES (AND FEARS)
AMONG THEIR COLLEAGUES. FOR THE FIRST TIME OBJECTIVE
OBSERVERS SEE CRACKS IN ARMY UNITY.

10. WE HAVE LOOKED AT AN ARRAY OF "WHAT IF" SCENARIOS
AND CONCLUDED THAT THERE IS REALLY ONLY ONE PROBABILITY.
ALL FOUR MEMBERS OF THE CURRENT JUNTA WOULD HAVE TO
STEP DOWN AND AN ACTIVE DUTY ARMY OFFICER SUCH AS NILO
FLOODY OR AGUSTIN TORO DAVILA WOULD REPLACE PINOCHET
AS JUNTA CHARMAN AND PRESIDENT. DISCARDED ARE ANY
SCENARIOS INVOLVING THE REMOVAL ONLY OF PINOCHET (THUS ANY
IN WHICH LEIGH WOULD BECOME PRESIDENT) OR INSTALLATION OF
A COMMITTED PINOCHET HARD-LINER LIKE GENERAL FORESTIER. OUT
OF THE QUESTION IS THE ASSUMPTION OF POWER BY
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, LET ALONG EX-UPERS. BY OUR READING,
SUCH A NEW JUNTA WOULD VIEW ITSELF AS INTERIM AND WOULD
NOT BE BOUND BY PINOCHET'S TRANSITION PLAN AND THUS MIGHT WELL
SPEED UP THE PROCESS. HOWEVER, WE CANNOT PREDICT WITH CERTAINTY
HOW A NEW PRESIDENT WOULD REACT. UNDER SOME CIRCUMSTANCES
HE MIGHT WISH TO BRAKE THE TRANSITION, ALTHOUGH THIS SEEMS
UNLIKELY.

11. IF THE JUNTA GOES, SO WHAT? SO LONG AS PINOCHET
WANTS TO HOLD ONTO POWER AND SO LONG AS HE REMAINS
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VULNERABLE, HE HAS SHOWN HIMSELF RESPONSIVE TO PRESSURE
TO ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION PROCESS AND SWALLOW OTHER
BITTER PILLS. IN MANY WAYS, AS DEMONSTRATED BY MOVEMENT
THIS MONTH, A VULNERABLE PINOCHET TRYING TO REGAIN

CONTROL PRODUCES AS MUCH OR PERHAPS EVEN GREATER
PROGRESS TOWARD NORMALITY THAN WOULD AN INEXPERIENCED
NEW JUNTA EVEN IF IT SOUGHT TO SERVE AS AN INTERIM
GOVERNMENT (AND THERE IS NO CERTAINTY THAT IT WOULD).
THE POINT IS THAT EITHER WAY, INTERNAL PRESSURES TOWARD
A TWO-THREE YEAR TRANSITION UNDER MILITARY TUTELAGE
ARE MOUNTING.

12. THE ISSUE FOR THE USG: THUS, THE CHALLENGE FOR USG
POLICY WITH OR WITHOUT PINOCHET IS TO MODULATE PRESSURES
ON THE GOC TO ENCOURAGE A PROMPT RETURN TO INSTITUTIONS
SAFEGUARDING HUMAN RIGHTS WITHOUT PROVOKING A BACKLASH.
WE BELIEVE THAT INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION AND PRESSURES
HAVE HASTENED POSITIVE CHANGBM IN THE INTERNBAL CHILEAN
ENVIRONMENT. EVENTS DURING THE PWGTIONTH ARE MORE EN-
COURAGING THAN WE COULD HAVE HOPED FOR EARLY THIS
YEAR.

THERE IS

A RESUMPTION THAT WE MUST BE DOING SOMETHING
RIGHT, THAT OUR POSTURE OF COOD DISDAIN AND A GENERALLY
LOW PROFILE HAS FACILITATED PROGRESS TO DATE. THIS
INMHUDES PUBLIC STATEMENTS ACKNOWLEDGING PROGRESS MADE
BUT DOES NOT MEAN LIFTING OF PRESENT SANCTIONS.
THIS COUNSEL WOULD BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT SHOULD THE
JUNTA FALL. CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN THE U.S. AND ELSEWHERE
WOULD BE ELATED AT THE DEPARTURE OF PINOCHET NO MATTER
WHO REPLACES HIM. A PREMATURE EMBRACE COULD BE RUINOUS.
WE SHOULD WAIT UNTIL THE DUST SETTLES AND THE ACTUAL
POLICIES OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT ARE VOUCHSAFED BY

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VERIFIABLE EVENTS.

13. THERE IS ALSO A TACTICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR
INVOLVED. MANY CHILEANS ALREADY ARE READY TO BELIEVE
THAT WE ARE MANIPULATING THE LETELIER INVESTIGATION
SO AS TO TOPPLE PINOCHET. SYMPTOMATIC OF THE LOCA
AMBIENCE, A LEADING BUSINESSMAN REPORTS A RUMOR THAT THE
EMBASSY IS "INTERVIEWING" POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS TO PINOCHET;
AND, COMMON GOSSIP HAS IT THAT THE AMBASSADOR CAME WITH THE
ASSIGNMENT OF OUSTING HIM. ANYTHING LENDING CREDENCE TO
SUCH MYTHS WOULD BE USED AGAINST US BY PINOCHET AND WOULD
NOT HELP A SUCCESSOR REGIME.

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